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## Classical CD Reviews

# “From the Bach Notebook” – J. S. BACH: Suites for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1007 – 1012, transcribed for harp – Victoria Drake, harp – Well-Tempered Productions

The suites are a revelation on the concert harp and quite different from the cello originals

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**“From the Bach Notebook” – J. S. BACH: Suites for Unaccompanied Cello, BWV 1007 – 1012, transcribed for harp – Victoria Drake, harp – Well-Tempered Productions (2 HDCD CDs) WRP 5193, 56:11, 70:11 \*\*\*\*:**

The music of Bach seems to lend itself to transcription better than almost any other composer. But aside from guitar and some of the higher-pitched solo strings, I don't believe many transcriptions of the Cello Suites have been made. Harpist Victoria Drake has previously recorded three other albums for Well-Tempered involving transcriptions: one of Scarlatti sonatas, one of Spanish classical music, and one of Bach lute and keyboard works. Her aim is to expand the meager repertory for the concert harp.

The historic solo cello recordings of the suites by Pablo Casals, made in 1936-39, introduced the six suites to the world, and still stands as one of classical recording's masterpieces. Janos Starker, Mstislav Rostropovich and Yo-Yo Ma are among the contemporary cellists who have recorded their interpretations of this musical monument. The works – written when Bach was 32 – were designed both for pedagogical purposes and for performance, beginning rather simply and gaining in complexity as they go on.

The sound of the Cello Suites on the concert harp provides a completely different experience from the original for cello. The harp is a soft-voiced instrument, and plucked rather than bowed. It can have powerful resonances that can rattle objects in a room (making it a good test for acoustically treating your listening room). The general effect of the harp version of the suites strikes me as more relaxed, optimistic, and less dramatic than the often weighty and emotional tenor of the work on the cello. Some of the lighter dance-based movements sound almost like pieces by some of the Impressionist composers. All six suites are transposed from their original key signatures; No. 6 – the longest – only a half step, from D Major to D-flat Major. They are presented in order over the two CDs. Excellent sonics, with or without a HDCD decoder. There is an illustrated time-line chart included combining information on the harp, Bach, Casals and various performances of the Suites. This is a fascinating interpretation of one of music's great masterpieces.

- John Sunier

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